

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL: KRSNA IN THE MAHABHARATA

DIWAKAR REGMI

Research, Lecture (NSU), Pindeshwar vidyapitha, Dharan, Nepal

ABSTRACT

Kṛṣṇa in the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata has complex roles. His rise to power and divinity has drawn many speculations and hypotheses from a number of Indologists around the world. Some critics believe that he “was not a god in the ‘original’ Mahabharata” (Das 94) and that additions and interpolations by his devotees “have raised him to divinity” (Dowson 161). Devout Hindus, on the other hand, believe Kṛṣṇa to be a born God, an avatar of Visnu and rule out the possibility that he was elevated to the status of God through interpolations. This article follows Kṛṣṇa through the Mahabharata narratives, right from his first entry till his demise, as an attempt to analyze his rise to divinity.

KEYWORDS: Mahabharata, Arjuna, Paṇḍavas & God

Received: Jan 20 2018; **Accepted:** Feb 09, 2018; **Published:** Mar 09, 2018; **Paper Id.:** IJHRJUN20182

INTRODUCTION

Kṛṣṇa's first appearance in the *Mahabharata* narrative takes place in the very first *parva* (book), *ādīparva* (introductory book). He comes to attend the *svayamvara* (self-choice of bridegroom) ceremony of Draupadī, the princess of Pāṇcāla, at an invitation of king Drupada. His first appearance is very ordinary. Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Draupadī's brother, mentions his name in his recitation of the names of dignitaries who have come to attend his sister's *svayamvara* from various kingdoms (I.185.17). Kṛṣṇa is said to have come to attend the ceremony along with his brother, Balarāma; sons, Sāmba and Pradyumna; and grandson, Aniruddha. He is mentioned as Vāsudeva as he is the son of Vasudeva. He is said to have come along with many Vṛṣṇis (Kṛṣṇa's tribesmen) all of whom are said to have been temporarily living in a camp. The first appearance of Kṛṣṇa does not give us an impression of him being a god or even being a hero. He is just a spectator, one among hundreds of other spectators.

We hear Kṛṣṇa talking, for the first time, about the Pāṇḍavas during the scuffle that follows Draupadī's *svayamvara*. Arjuna, the son of Pāṇḍu and Kuntī, participates in the *svayamvara* in the guise of a *Brāhmaṇa* mendicant and wins the hand of the princess. The *Kṣatriya* kings and princes present at the ceremony feel humiliated. They target Drupada as well as Arjuna. All the Pāṇḍava brothers, clad in *Brāhmaṇa* attire, stand in Arjuna's side in the scuffle. While almost all participants show their concern to the event taking either the side of the *Brāhmaṇa* mendicant or the *Kṣatriya* kings and princes, Kṛṣṇa happily watches the scuffle as a mere spectator. He secretly tells his brother Balarāma that the *Brāhmaṇa* mendicants are actually Pāṇḍava brothers and that the boy who won Draupadī is Arjuna (I.188.20).

The Pāṇḍavas were unknown about Kṛṣṇa's presence at the ceremony. They did not recognize him. But Arjuna seems to have been acquainted with Kṛṣṇa's power and influence. Otherwise, he would not have invoked Kṛṣṇa as he actually does it (I.187.18) before he picks up his bow to meet Drupada's target. Kṛṣṇa, though unknown to all the dignitaries and participants, thus, becomes a pivotal person of the *svayamvara* ceremony.

Since the very first meeting with the Pāṇḍavas that takes place immediately after Draupadī's *svayamvara*, Kṛṣṇa has played a "pivotal role in the *Mahābhārata*" (Johnson 179). He, along with Balarāma, goes to the cottage of a *kumbhakāra* (potter) where the Pāṇḍavas were hiding in disguise from the Kauravas after the latter's murderous plan in the house. This is the first meeting of the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa in person because Kṛṣṇa here introduces himself and Balarāma by their names to his aunt, Kuntī, and her sons, the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa gives little impression of his power to the Pāṇḍavas in the very first meeting because he gives Kuntī and Yudhiṣṭhira blessings (I.190.25) before leaving for his camp. Kṛṣṇa is junior in relation to both of them, and a junior is not supposed to give blessings to his seniors.

Since Draupadī's *svayamvara*, Kṛṣṇa has always been a counselor and guardian to the Pāṇḍavas. He avails himself of their service in every important event of their life. He acts in such a way that every hero in the Pāṇḍava camp is overshadowed. To exert his power and influence over the Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa acts very cunningly from his very first meeting with them. He sends various valuable gifts to the Pāṇḍavas after their marriage to Draupadī (I.198.13-18). He accompanies the Pāṇḍavas to KhāṇḍavaPrastha (a forest on the bank of river Yamunā), the land the Pāṇḍavas get as their kingdom after Dhṛtarāṣṭra divides his kingdom among his hundred sons and the five sons of Pāṇḍu. He helps them develop a city there and the place, afterward, is known as Indraprastha.

The next time Kṛṣṇa comes into the *Mahabharata* narratives during Arjuna's pilgrimage to Prabhāsa. By this time Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have been so intimate that they are introduced as each other's *sakhā* (friend) (I.217.4). They have got a combined identity of Naranārāyaṇa (I.217.5). Kṛṣṇa takes Arjuna to Dvārakā where Arjuna meets Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā and falls in love with her. Kṛṣṇa, understanding Arjuna's feelings for Subhadrā, suggests him to abduct her and make her his wife. He helps Arjuna abduct Subhadrā although all the Vṛṣṇis are against Arjuna. He goes to Indraprastha with gifts and dowry to meet the Pāṇḍavas. At Indraprastha, he helps Agni (fire god) destroy Khāṇḍava forest. He rescues a demon Maya, who is later employed to construct Yudhiṣṭhira's palace. Kṛṣṇa, then, takes Arjuna and Bhima to Magadha, the kingdom of Jarāsandha. Kṛṣṇa had long been offended by Jarāsandha with the help of a boon from Śiva. Jarāsandha besieged Mathurā and attacked Kṛṣṇa eighteen times, finally compelling him to retire to Dvārakā. Kṛṣṇa believes that he can kill Jarāsandha with the help of Arjuna and Bhima. He says, "I have a policy, Bhimasena has strength, and Arjuna will protect both of us. As three fires complete a *yajña* (sacrifice), we three will, therefore, complete the task of killing the king of Magadha" (II.20.3). Yudhiṣṭhira's response to this remark of Kṛṣṇa overshadows the power and strength of Arjuna and Bhima. He establishes Kṛṣṇa as the basic essentiality of the Pāṇḍavas as he says, "You are the master of all the Pāṇḍavas; you give us protection" (II.20.9).

Kṛṣṇa's power and influence in the *Mahābhārata* grows gradually and consistently to take him to the status of a god. By the time of Yudhiṣṭhira's *srājasūya* (royal consecration) sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa becomes worthy of worship not only to the Pāṇḍavas but also to Bhīṣma. For, it was Bhīṣma who had recommended that Kṛṣṇa deserves *agrapūjā* (first honor) in the sacrifice (II.36.28-29). Kṛṣṇa, for Bhīṣma, is not only worthy of *agrapūjā*, but he acknowledges him of being the master of the whole universe (II.44.1). Kṛṣṇa justifies Bhīṣma's remark indeed. He miraculously produces *Sudarśanacakra* (Viṣṇu's discus) and decapitates Śiśupāla, the king of Cedi, who negates the idea of Kṛṣṇa's *agrapūjā* abusing him as a foolish cowherd. On Śiśupāla's demise, *Teja* (vital power or luster) comes out of the dead body and enters into Kṛṣṇa. All the kings and dignitaries are witness to this miracle (II.45.27). This event establishes Kṛṣṇa as *amāyāvī* (miraculous) god among many kings of the world.

After the *rājasūya* sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa's next appearance in the *Mahābhārata* narrative takes place at the end of the game of dice. He further justifies himself to be an *amāyāvī* god by appearing in an invisible form to protect Draupadī from being disrobed by Duḥśāsana. Kṛṣṇa could not come to attend Dhṛtarāṣṭra's assembly because while the Pāṇḍavas were playing the game of dice with the Kauravas, Kṛṣṇa was fighting Śālva who had attacked Ānarta from his wish-driven *vimāna* (aerial chariot) in Kṛṣṇa's absence as a revenge of the death of Śiśupāla at Kṛṣṇa's hand at Yudhiṣṭhira's *srājasūya* sacrifice. Later, after the Pāṇḍavas leave Hastināpura for their fourteen years exile to a forest, Kṛṣṇa comes to visit them and narrates why he was unable to come to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's assembly. His remark emphasizes his basic essentiality to the Pāṇḍavas. He says that he would have prevented the Pāṇḍavas from falling into such a catastrophe if he had been at Dvārakā at that time (III.13.1-2).

Kṛṣṇa visits the Pāṇḍavas three times during the latter's twelve years exile to the forest. All of the visits are important to establish Kṛṣṇa as a god. The first visit takes place at Prabhāsa where the Pāṇḍavas have gone for pilgrimage. It was a very short meeting with very few conversations. However, Yudhiṣṭhira, in this meeting, introduces Kṛṣṇa not only as his master, but the protector of the entire human world (III.120.29). This introduction is corroborated by Mārkaṇḍeya, at a legendary *ṛṣi* (seer), who goes to visit the Pāṇḍavas during their stay in the Kāmayaka forest along with Kṛṣṇa. Here Mārkaṇḍeya introduces Kṛṣṇa as an omnipotent and *acintya* (inconceivable) god who is the sole *dhātā* (creator), *vidhātā* (protector) and *saṃhartā* (destroyer), hence the eternal master, lord of Prajāpati (the lord of creatures) (III.189.54-55). In the *Purāṇas* and later Sanskrit texts "the deity most readily associated with the periodic destruction of the world is Śiva" (Thomas 255), and the deities associated with creation and protection are Brahmā and Viṣṇu respectively. Śiva, Brahmā and Viṣṇu frequently appear in the *Mahābhārata* as well. But Kṛṣṇa very mysteriously sneaks into the *Mahābhārata* narratives as all the three, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer, overshadowing the *trimūrti* (the Hindu trinity, i.e. Śiva, Brahmā and Viṣṇu).

Kṛṣṇa comes into the *Mahābhārata* narratives many times after the indirect revelation that he is *dhātā*, *vidhātā* and *saṃhartā*. All of his subsequent appearances in the narratives justify the above mentioned epithets of Kṛṣṇa. His first appearance after this revelation takes place in a Kāmayaka forest at an invocation of Draupadī. Durvāsas, a sage known for his irascible temper, along with his disciples, visits the Pāṇḍavas desiring for food. Draupadī, having had nothing to offer to the sage and fearing the resultant curse for him, invokes Kṛṣṇa who was then in bed with his wife Rukmiṇī in Dvārakā. She refers to him as *viśvātman* (soul of the universe) and *viśvajana* (father of the universe) (III.263.9), and begs him to come to protect her from the possible anger of Durvāsas. Kṛṣṇa, who is capable of *acintyagati* (in conceivable speed) (III.263.18), comes instantly to rescue Draupadī. This episode, though believed to be an interpolation (Mehendale 199), heightens Kṛṣṇa as the protector of his devotees and corroborates his act of saving Draupadī from being disrobed at the Kaurava assembly.

In *virāṭaparva* (book of Virāṭa) Kṛṣṇa appears only once with considerably insignificant role. He comes to attend Abhimanyu's marriage with Uttarā, king Virāṭa's daughter, at Arjuna's invitation. The *Mahābhārata* narratives continue from the *virāṭaparva* to *udyoḡaparva* which is entirely dominated by Kṛṣṇa. Until *virāṭaparva*, the *Mahābhārata* is mainly the story of the Pāṇḍavas, their sufferings and revenge, but after the *virāṭaparva* the *Mahābhārata* comes to be the story of Kṛṣṇa. In all the war stories, the courage and prowess of the Pāṇḍava warriors are overshadowed by the overwhelming presence of Kṛṣṇa. All of the enemies of the Pāṇḍavas become the enemies of Kṛṣṇa. However, the purposes of struggle are different. The Pāṇḍavas define their struggle as a struggle for justice, whereas Kṛṣṇa defines it as an essential cosmic

rule for the destruction of the evil. The purpose behind his involvement in the family conflict is vividly apocalyptic one. He fights for *yugānta* (the end of the epoch).

The *udyogaparva* begins with a speech by Kṛṣṇa in which he attempts to convince the Pāṇḍavas that the Kauravas will duly be punished for what they have done, and that the Pāṇḍavas will get their reign back. He says that if the Kauravas did not return the Pāṇḍavas their kingdom, they would inevitably fight a war which would destroy the Kauravas (V.1.21). Kṛṣṇa is undoubtedly in favor of a war as he ultimately wants to destroy the *yoga* (epoch), but he wants his job done very carefully and systematically. For this, he takes recourse to diplomacy and politics. He believes that the Pāṇḍavas can take back their lost kingdom by force, but, at the same time, he is not unmindful that opening a war without knowing the enemy's intentions creates a bad impression on the public. Therefore, he suggests that the Pāṇḍavas should first send an envoy to Hastināpura (V.1.24).

The Pāṇḍavas are well acquainted with Kṛṣṇa's divine power as they have long been acquainted with each other. Duryodhana, however, does not know of Kṛṣṇa's true identity and power. In the *udyogaparva* both Arjuna and Duryodhana go to Dvārakā to visit Kṛṣṇa seeking his assistance in the contemplated war. Duryodhana, in princely manner, takes a chair at the head of Kṛṣṇa, who was then asleep in bed, whereas Arjuna, following the manner of servitude, sits at Kṛṣṇa's feet. When Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna a choice between himself unarmed and his ten career soldiers, Arjuna, without any hesitation, stands for Kṛṣṇa unarmed whereas Duryodhana is content to have Kṛṣṇa's soldiers in his side. Kṛṣṇa must have been enraged by Duryodhana's princely behavior which he duly answers at Hastināpura when he goes to visit Dhṛtarāṣṭra as Yudhiṣṭhira's envoy.

The Pāṇḍava brothers have long been acquainted to Kṛṣṇa but the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra are almost unaware of Kṛṣṇa's power. The *udyogaparva*, as a whole, true to its meaning, is an effort of the redactors and the reciters to establish Kṛṣṇa as the god. The method is again, as in the case of the Pāṇḍavas, indirect to direct. The compiler of the *Mahābhārata*, Vyāsa, he gets Saṃjaya, a reciter by caste, to explain the grandeur of Kṛṣṇa (V.67.10). Saṃjaya establishes Kṛṣṇa as the *īśa* (lord) (V.67.14) capable of defeating the entire universe alone (V.67.7). Kṛṣṇa is *kāla* (time) as well as *mṛtyu* (death) (V.68.13). Saṃjaya accepts that Kṛṣṇa's power has not yet been revealed to the Kauravas (V.68.3) and explains how they [the Kauravas] can achieve Kṛṣṇa.

The indirect method does not work efficiently. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is convinced of Kṛṣṇa to be the *īśa* but his sons are proud of their power and property that, they believe, can win them the world. Therefore, despite the objection of Yudhiṣṭhira (V.72.82), Kṛṣṇa decides to go to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's court as an envoy of peace. It is evident that Kṛṣṇa wants war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, but he wants to visit the Kauravas prior to the war. By the last attempt to establish peace, Duryodhana has accepted Kṛṣṇa to be worthy of worship in all the three worlds (V.88.5), but he, in princely manner, objects to his father's plan to confer special honor to Kṛṣṇa (V.88.3). Kṛṣṇa responds to Duryodhana's 'princely manner' by rejecting Duryodhana's invitation for dinner. He explains that one should accept another's grain only if it is offered out of compassion, and if one has fallen into certain danger (V.91.25). Kṛṣṇa finds none of the conditions compatible with his situation. Instead, he prefers to dine at Vidura's. Kṛṣṇa, here is giving a clear message that he, as the *īśa*, is happy only with those who submit themselves to him and his cause. He is happy with the Pāṇḍavas because the latter submit themselves to him; and he is equally happy with Vidura because he too submits himself to him. Vidura too, like Yudhiṣṭhira, objects to Kṛṣṇa's plan to visit Duryodhana with an intention to establish peace. He describes Duryodhana to be impulsive (V.92.5) and to be skeptical about Kṛṣṇa (V.92.19). He establishes Kṛṣṇa as the *antarātmā* (inner soul) of

everything that is *dehī* (having a body) (V.92.30).

Kṛṣṇa wants others to listen to him, but he himself does not listen to anybody. He condemns Yudhiṣṭhira's and Vidura's suggestion that he should not visit a mean person like Duryodhana. He is careful not to be condemned by the public of being partial (V.93.17). His mission is not essential to establish peace between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, but to prove his basic essentiality to the Kauravas as well. For that, he is eager to employ all four policies: *sāma* (placation), *dāna* (charity), *daṇḍa* (punishment) and *bheda* (division), the political methodologies prescribed by the scriptures (Krishnananda 9). He knows that *īśa* must behave all equally. Therefore, he helps Duryodhana by offering him his soldiers. And, at the same time, if his policy of placation fails, he is ready to establish his basic essentiality through force as well. When all of his policies fail, he feels the need for the policy of *daṇḍa* (V.150.18).

Kṛṣṇa gives a speech at the Kaurava assembly attended by many *ṛṣis* and dignitaries. He recites Yudhiṣṭhira's message to king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and asks him to control his son Duryodhana. He spends all his time in talking about the need for peace. He also warns them of the possible consequences if they fail to establish peace (V.95.31). Though Kṛṣṇa has gone to the Kaurava assembly to prove his basic essentiality and to establish himself *īśa*, he does not do it himself. Parasurāma, after Kṛṣṇa's speech, introduces him as Nārāyaṇa (V.96.49) giving an anecdote of Dambhodbhava. Parasurāma's introduction of Kṛṣṇa as Nārāyaṇa parallels Mārkaṇḍeya's introduction of Kṛṣṇa as Bālamukunda (III.189.52). Parasurāma's presence and his introduction of Kṛṣṇa is very meaningful here. Parasurāma himself, like Kṛṣṇa, is an *avatāra* (incarnation) of Nārāyaṇa. In this sense, Nārāyaṇa in the form of Parasurāma introduces himself in the form of Kṛṣṇa. Parasurāma's narration of the anecdote of Dambhodbhava was intended to cause fear of Kṛṣṇa in Duryodhana. However, Duryodhana was not scared. He says in the assembly that even the *Deva* (god) cannot defeat Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kripa and Karṇa, let alone the Pāṇḍavas (V.127.14). His remark shows his skepticism about Kṛṣṇa as the *īśa*. This skepticism is further justified when Duryodhana makes a plan to imprison Kṛṣṇa (V.130.4-5). Sātyaki timely informs the assembly of Duryodhana's plan. Also, he narrates various difficult and seemingly impossible works that Kṛṣṇa has performed. Sātyaki's speech was also intended to establish Kṛṣṇa as the *īśa*.

Kṛṣṇa's mission was not peace between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. His mission was not the Pāṇḍava cause. He had gone to Hastināpura for his personal cause. Peace pact was only a pretext. He becomes successful in his mission. When Sātyaki informs the assembly of Duryodhana's plan, Kṛṣṇa decides to use his last weapon to prove his basic essentiality: he manifests his *viśvarūpa* (universal form) (V.131.1-13). Not only the Kauravas, many kings and *ṛṣis* present at the assembly saw the *viśvarūpa* which suggests that the entire universe rests within Kṛṣṇa. Even the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra sees Kṛṣṇa's *viśvarūpa* with a mercy from Kṛṣṇa himself. Kṛṣṇa has thus revealed to the Kauravas such a secret which he has not revealed even to his *sakhā* Arjuna. For, the Pandavas have only been narrated of Kṛṣṇa's *viśvarūpa* by Mārkaṇḍeya (III.189.1-49). Kṛṣṇa has never felt a need to reveal his *viśvarūpa* to the Pāṇḍavas as they have already submitted themselves to him.

When Kṛṣṇa finds that Duryodhana is not in favor of the peace pact, he begins war preparation on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas. He visits Karṇa and reveals Karṇa's true identity as a son of Kuntī. This revelation is a well intended revelation because it could demoralize Karṇa at the inception of the contemplated war. Kṛṣṇa knew very well of the power and valor of Karṇa who had only one cause behind his involvement in the war; he wanted to prove his worth as a *kṣatriya* hero by defeating Arjuna in the war. Kṛṣṇa asks him to switch sides. If he did, the war could be prevented and he could become the king of Hastināpura. Karṇa, however, rejects the temptation of the crown for the sake of his love to his friend Duryodhana

and his foster parents. Karṇa has his reasons to remain loyal to Duryodhana, but Kṛṣṇa, with this revelation, gets his job done. He has been successful in justifying his statesmanship in the *Mahābhārata* (Bryant 111), especially through his efforts in the *UdyogaParva*.

Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* becomes more enigmatic when we find his approach to war to be equivocal. He asks the Kauravas to put down their weapons, whereas he asks the Pāṇḍavasto take recourse to arms. When he warns the Kauravas against the war, he provokes the Pandavas for the war. Arjuna is reluctant, at the beginning of the war, to fight his *guru* (teacher) Droṇa and other kinsmen and relatives. Kṛṣṇa convinces him to fight by giving him a long lecture on *karma yoga* (the discipline of action), *jñāna yoga* (the discipline of knowledge) and *Bhakti yoga* (the discipline of devotion). His lecture to Arjuna prior to the war of Kurukṣetra, as a whole, is known as *Bhagavadgītā* (song of the lord). The episode of the *Bhagavadgītā* is obviously a later addition and is believed to begin *Bhakti* movement in Indian religions (Sukdaven 14). The *Bhakti* movement reaches its culmination in the *Bhāgavata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, the latter of which is believed to be a *khila* (appendix) of the *Mahābhārata* (Lorenz 95). Also, the *Bhagavadgītā* "teaches a potential king the 'royal science' (*rājavidyā*), the knowledge of the just exercise of his power" (Malinar 443). In addition to giving philosophical and political lectures in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa introduces himself to Arjuna as being the primitive cause even of the gods and sages (VI.34.2). At an invocation of Arjuna, he manifests his *viśvarūpa* of which Arjuna had only heard about from Mārkaṇḍeya. After seeing Kṛṣṇa's *viśvarūpa*, Arjuna is not only ready to fight, but is also convinced that their victory is inevitable as they have had a favor from the Lord.

The *Mahābhārata* went through a series of interpolations from a number of reciters and redactors. The *Suta* and the *Niṣāda* reciters are believed to have made the warriors of their caste, Karṇa and Ekalavya respectively, celebrated heroes of the epic (MullickBahadur 40). Similarly, the devotees of Kṛṣṇa have composed many verses and added them to the *Mahābhārata* narratives, making him the lord of the universe. Kṛṣṇa sneaks gradually and consistently into the *Mahābhārata* narratives sidelining and overshadowing the epic heroes as per the plan of his devotees. "The author of the *Gītā*", says Robert N. Minor, "took the approach of progressively adding devotion to the text, beginning with the more immediate issues of the battlefield and appropriate action and slowly adding teachings of Kṛṣṇa's place beyond and over the universe and his relationship to the individual" (79).

The *Bhagavadgītā* is later parodied by Bhīṣma addressing Duryodhana. Bhīṣma sings of the grandeur of Kṛṣṇa and establishes him as Nārāyaṇa:

Duryodhana! The son of Vasudeva is in fact great. He is the god of all the gods. Nobody is greater than the lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa. Mārkaṇḍeya tells strange things about Govinda. He is the soul of every matter. He had created all three matters, water, air and heat in the beginning of the creation. The lord of the world created the earth and slept in water. The lustrous god slept there with the power of his *yoga*. He created fire out of his mouth, air out of his breath, and Sarasvatī (the goddess of knowledge) and the *Vedas* out of his heart. (VI.66.2-6)

Bhīṣma asks Duryodhana to submit himself to Kṛṣṇa thinking that he is the father and teacher to everyone.

Kṛṣṇa asks the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravasto keep their promises and vows. But for himself, neither war-rules nor promises are barriers to his action. When Arjuna had visited him in Dvārakā seeking for his help in the contemplated war, he had given him a choice between himself unarmed and his soldiers. Arjuna had chosen Kṛṣṇa unarmed. Kṛṣṇa was only a charioteer of Arjuna's chariot. The conditions, thus, stated that Kṛṣṇa was bound by *Dharma* (duty) that he should only

drive an Arjuna's chariot but not fight. Kṛṣṇa, however, is not bound by any rule and condition. He does what he needs to do to protect the Pāṇḍavas and destroy the Kauravas. He knows that to go beyond man, he must go beyond good and evil. He feels that the Pāṇḍavas cannot bear all such burdens of being lawbreakers for the fear of social stigma. They are *kṣatriya* princes and they should remain loyal to *kṣatriya Dharma* (the duty of a *kṣatriya*) and *andrāja Dharma* (the duty of a king). They must not do things that might make them 'bad' in the eyes of the public. But, for Kṛṣṇa, he must release himself from this petty debate of 'good' versus 'bad'. For him, exertion is good. For him, law-breaking too is good. Without exertion and law-breaking he cannot go beyond good and evil, he cannot become lord himself. It is the reason he takes responsibility for every foul play of the Pāṇḍavas in the battlefield. He frequently breaks war-rules and provokes Arjuna for the same because it has now become Kṛṣṇa's war and a victory in the war could give him the grandeur of the god. Friedrich Nietzsche's remark, "... all great things have first to wander about the earth as enormous and awe-inspiring caricatures" (513), is quite appropriate to the character of Kṛṣṇa. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, he accepts that it is his war and that he has designed it for the destruction of the evil and reinstatement of good (VI.28.7-8). Kṛṣṇa's multi-faceted roles have made him a remarkable character, if not good for all, in the *Mahābhārata*. By now, he has become "the subject matter of legends and literature, political and theological dissertations, controversy and conflict" (Sonde 7).

It becomes clear, after the *Bhagavadgītā*, that the war is Kṛṣṇa's and that all the enemies of Arjuna are the enemies of Kṛṣṇa himself, and that the desired end of the war is not only the destruction of the Kauravas but *yugānta* (end of the epoch). For that end, Kṛṣṇa is prepared to take up any role in the war. He sometimes is seen driving an Arjuna's chariot, which is his actual duty, whereas sometimes he is seen making war strategies. He encourages Arjuna to fight the fiercest battle. Moreover, sometimes he is ready to fight the enemies himself. For example, on the third day of the war, when Bhīṣma falls hard on the Pāṇḍavas, he jumps off the chariot and runs towards Bhīṣma with his *Sudarśanacakra* intending to fight Bhīṣma (VI.59.88-89). He cools down only when Arjuna promises to fight up to his full capacity to destroy the Kaurava warriors. We can see the repetition of a similar scene on the ninth day of the war when Kṛṣṇa in anger jumps off his chariot and runs towards Bhīṣma with a whip (VI.106.55-57). At this time too, Arjuna reminds Kṛṣṇa of his vow that he would not fight in the war. It shows that "Kṛṣṇa firmly believes that once you make the fateful decision to go to war, then you must win at any cost" (Das 185).

Kṛṣṇa is ready to do anything for a victory of the Pāṇḍavas. His vow is not a barrier to any action. He is ready to break his vow as well. In a dialogue with Yudhiṣṭhira he says that he is ready to bear arms and fight Bhīṣma even though it is against his vow. But, for this, he seeks Yudhiṣṭhira's permission (Vi.107.28-30). When the Pāṇḍavas are tired and frustrated, he encourages them to fight, reminding them of the *kṣatriya Dharma* but he himself is not always bound by *kṣatriyadharma*. To achieve his desired end, he can any time go beyond *kṣatriya Dharma* and, instead of relying entirely on his valor and strength; he takes recourse to tricks and foul play. Four warriors in the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Duryodhana, are killed unfairly at an instigation of Kṛṣṇa. All these four warriors were invincible, even two gods as long as they bore arms and as long as the prescribed war-rules were followed. Bhīṣma had a vow that he would not use weapons against a woman. Knowing about this vow from Bhīṣma himself, Kṛṣṇa brings Śikhāṇḍin, the son-turned daughter of king Drupada, to fight Bhīṣma in front of Arjuna who then shoots arrows at the unarmed grandsire.

Droṇa, in the similar way, is killed treacherously. When all the attempts of the Pāṇḍavas failed, one after the other, to kill Droṇa and when he became more destructive, Kṛṣṇa thinks of treacherous way to kill him. Kṛṣṇa knew that Droṇa could not be killed as long as he bore arms and that he would not bear arms at the death of his son Aśvatthāman.

Kṛṣṇa instigates Yudhiṣṭhira to tell a lie. When Yudhiṣṭhira reluctantly does it Droṇa puts down his weapons and Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna, the son of Drupada, decapitates him. In the similar way, Karṇa is decapitated by Arjuna at an instigation of Kṛṣṇa when he was unarmed. Duryodhana too was killed unfairly because, against the rule of the war, he was hit, at Kṛṣṇa's instigation, on the thigh. Moreover, Jayadratha's death was also possible because of Kṛṣṇa's *smāyāvī* trick. For Kṛṣṇa, the war is a *yajña* for which he has consistently worked for a long time. He rids himself from the impediments of conventional morality and goes beyond *Dharma* and *aDharma* for the accomplishment of the *yajña*. He can perform *adhārmic* activities for the purpose of what he says establishment of *Dharma*, thus, making himself a *Dharma* consequentialist (Dowd 42). Danielle Feller writes about Kṛṣṇa's plan for the *yajña*:

The *raṇayajña* precisely has as its highest aim the destruction of evildoers and the establishment of *Dharma*. That is why Kṛṣṇa strives throughout his career to bring about the war, which will have the above mentioned effects. Indeed, he acts in this sense long before the war itself. Thus he gets rid of various powerful kings, who might have become the allies of the Kauravas in the war. (278)

It is not unnatural to kill enemies in war. And if one believes in the saying that everything is fair in war, Kṛṣṇa's tricks and treacheries are pardonable. But, Kṛṣṇa kills not only enemies. If a victory is ensured, he can kill his friends as well. The case of the death of Ghaṭotkaca is an example of how Kṛṣṇa can go beyond good and evil for the achievement of his goal. He makes a grand design for the death of Ghaṭotkaca at the hand of Karṇa, a warrior in the enemy camp. He actually gets Ghaṭotkaca killed. The death of Ghaṭotkaca shocks every Pāṇḍava as he is a son of Bhima from Hidimbā. Knowing that Ghaṭotkaca has died at Karṇa's hand, Kṛṣṇa dances in rejoicing (VII.179.3) because Ghaṭotkaca's death ensured the victory of Arjuna over Karṇa as the latter, with Ghaṭotkaca's death, had lost his infallible weapon *śakti* gifted to him by Indra in exchange of his divine earrings and impenetrable body armor.

Kṛṣṇa's basic essentiality for the Pandavas is further emphasized during the war. He saves the Pāṇḍavas including Arjuna several times. He is seen using his *māyāvī* tricks and divine power. He frequently violates the prescribed war-rules and justifies the violation on his own way, or sometimes gets them justified from somebody's mouth. Kṛṣṇa is very flexible about his decisions and opinions too. While provoking the Pāṇḍavas to fight the Kauravas, he asks them to take recourse to *kṣatriya Dharma* which states that the *Kṣatriyas* can get redemption through valor and courage. Also, it states that the *kṣatriyas* are determined not to surrender their weapons in the midst of a war. But Kṛṣṇa finds no problem with violating *kṣatriya Dharma* if a violation ensures a victory of the Pāṇḍavas. One such incident of the *kṣatriyas* putting down their weapons against their *svadharma* (inherent duty) takes place in the *Mahābhārata* at Kṛṣṇa's instigation. Aśvatthāman, enraged by the death of his father Droṇa, uses *Nārāyaṇāstra* (an infallible weapon) against the Pāṇḍava troops. No weapon of the Pāṇḍavas can pacify Aśvatthāman's weapon. Even Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna fail to pacify it. Yudhiṣṭhira, seeing all the Pāṇḍava troops running away in panic, thinks of immolation along with his brothers (VII.199.28). Kṛṣṇa knows the real power of *Nārāyaṇāstra* and, thinking that it is essential to save the Pāṇḍavas now, he asks all the warriors to jump off their chariots and put down their weapons (VII.199.38). Only Bhima objects to it telling Arjuna that it is a violation of their *svadharma*. Kṛṣṇa forcefully brings him down his chariot and, thus, pacifies Aśvatthāman's weapon. Aśvatthāman then uses *Āgneyāstra* (fire weapon) targeting Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, but the weapon fails to harm them. Aśvatthāman is saddened to see Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna armed by his weapon and asks Vyāsa why his weapon failed to kill them, "Is it *māyā* or a divine will? I don't know what it is. How the weapon failed? What mistake did I make?" (VII.201.50). In answer to this question Vyāsa says that Kṛṣṇa is the incarnation of Nārāyaṇa, the eternal existence and the

primeval cause of every existence, and Kṛṣṇa's *sakhā* Arjuna, the incarnation of Nara, the primeval man (VII.201.85-86). They are, says Vyāsa, invincible to every weapon.

Keeping one's promises and vows is considered a *kṣatriya trait* and this trait is highly lauded in the *Mahābhārata*. But Kṛṣṇa does not always think of keeping vows to be a lofty virtue. For him, what is important is whether or not the vow to take one to the desired goal. If the vowels make one weak, such vows should better be broken. Similarly, truth and untruth, for Kṛṣṇa, should be determined by, not what it is but where it takes. If untruth gives better result than truth, then untruth is more desirable than truth (VIII.69.32). Kṛṣṇa applies his idea of 'beyond good and evil' into practice by making Arjuna break his vow. Arjuna had a vow that he would kill anybody who insulted his *Gaṇḍīva* bow. Yudhiṣṭhira insults it when Arjuna fails to kill Karna for a long time after the war started ((VIII.68.30). On this, Arjuna picks up his sword, willing to kill Yudhiṣṭhira to keep his vow, but Kṛṣṇa prevents him from committing fratricide by telling him that insult it is tantamount to killing, and asks him to use abusive language against Yudhiṣṭhira to keep his vow (VIII.69.86). Thus, Kṛṣṇa does not adhere to what people say about *Dharma*, he can define it in his own way, and can justify his definition. He is all "good and bad, noble and ignoble, pleasant and the unpleasant" (Sonde 305). For him, nothing is absolute good and nothing is absolutely bad. Whatever it is, if it takes one to the desired goal, it is good; and if it does not, it is bad. The winner is always the Arjuna, and loser the Duryodhana. Kṛṣṇa can make good bad and bad good. He asks Arjuna to deviate from his vow to kill Yudhiṣṭhira so that he can save Yudhiṣṭhira, but he asks Bhima to keep his vow of breaking Duryodhana's thigh against the war-rule so that he can get Duryodhana killed.

Kṛṣṇa's basic essentiality for the Pāṇḍavas is proved after the death of Duryodhana. Duryodhana's death marks the end of the war. No sooner does Kṛṣṇa get off the Arjuna's chariot, than the chariot burns down. Kṛṣṇa explains that the chariot was actually shattered by Droṇa and Karna, but it had still been intact due to Kṛṣṇa's presence on it. It proves the words of the author, Vyāsa, who said "*yatodharmastataḥKṛṣṇoyataḥKṛṣṇastatojayah*" (where there is *Dharma* there is Kṛṣṇa, where there is Kṛṣṇa there is victory) (IX.62.31). Emily T. Hudson summarizes Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* in a sentence, "Kṛṣṇa as the divine destroyer masterminds the war, its devastation and its concomitant suffering" (246).

Kṛṣṇa remains an essential part of the Pāṇḍavas even after the fall of Duryodhana. He plays an important role to establish peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the bereaved king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his wife Gāndhārī. He saves the Pāṇḍavas from the wrath of Aśvatthāman and gives life to Abhimanyu's son Parikṣita who was killed by Aśvatthāman in the womb of his mother and was born dead. He instructs and helps the Pāṇḍavas to perform *aśvamedhayajña* (horse sacrifice) and blesses Bhīṣma, the wounded grandsire, with power so that he can deliver didactic discourses to Yudhiṣṭhira.

Kṛṣṇa's role in the *Mahābhārata* can be studied by dividing it into three phases: pre-war, war and post-war appearances. If we divide the *Mahābhārata* narrative into three periods, we find that Kṛṣṇa in all the periods is trying to establish himself the lord and the sole object of worship. When he faces obstacle and when he finds suspicion of people, he manifests his *viśvarūpa* to them and easily makes them his devotee. Time and again, different *ṛsis* corroborate him. Kṛṣṇa's attempts of establishing himself the lord, are consistent throughout the *Mahābhārata* narratives. Whenever necessary, even the author comes into the narrative to establish Kṛṣṇa as the lord. We find many such occasions in the epic when the enigmatic personality of the author "moves in and out of the epic narrative both as author and character, with the prescience and mysterious ways of God" (Dhand 34).

Kṛṣṇa manifests his *viśvarūpa* only once in the post-war *Mahābhārata*. He meets a sage, Uttan̄ka, on his way to Dvārakā. The sage is angry at Kṛṣṇa for his failure to establish peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, and is prompted to curse him. At this, Kṛṣṇa explains some *adhyātmataṭva* (spiritual facts) to the sage and calms him down. In his brief discourse, he tells Uttan̄ka who he is, what he did in the past and hints indirectly what he will do in the future. He hints that he can go beyond good and evil when required because he says that all the three *guṇas* (qualities), viz. *Tamas* (darkness), *rajas* (passion) and *sattva* (purity) are inherent in him (XIV.54.2). He further says:

Every matter is present in me and conversely, I am present in every matter. Remember it very well. You should have no doubt about it. All the *Daityas*, *Yakṣas*, *Gandharvas*, *Rakṣasas*, *Nāgas* and *Apsarās* originated from me. All those things what the wise men call *sat* (being) and *assault* (non-being), *vyakta* (overt) and *avyakta* (covert), *kṣara* (perishable) and *akṣara* (imperishable) are my own forms. (XIV.54.3-5)

Kṛṣṇa establishes himself the supreme lord, the basic essence of the world when he says, “I am Viṣṇu, I am Brahmā and I am Indra. I am the cause of origin of all matters and *pralaya* (dissolution). I am the creator and the destroyer of every creature” (XIV.54.14). If so, why could he not stop the war and save the kṣatriya warriors? He could have used his divine power and interfered in the caran -Pāṇḍava dispute if he really wanted to stop the war. Uttan̄ka meant to ask these questions as he was appalled by the mass-destruction of the *kṣatriya* warriors in the war. Kṛṣṇa very cunningly but contradictory answers these questions:

When I am born as a *Gandharva*, I behave like a *Gandharva*. There is no doubt about it. I behave as a *Nāga* when I am born a *Naga*. I follow the manners of *Yakṣa* and *Rakṣasas* when I am born into their family. Right now I have borne a man, therefore my first appealed the Kauravas for a treaty without using my divine power, but they condemned my good wishes. Then I wrathfully warned them showing the consequences of the war, but, inspired by *adharma* ((unrighteousness) and *kāla* (death), they did not listen to me. (XIV.54.18-21)

Though Kṛṣṇa claims to have fought the war on the ground of *Dharma* (righteousness) without using his divine power, it is evident in the *Mahābhārata* that he has, not only once, many times used his divine power to destroy the Kauravas and save the Pāṇḍavas. Here, he seems only to be justifying his ordinary human death as he says that he behaves as a man when he is born a man. Hildebrandt rightly remarks that the *Mahābhārata* is the first text to “portray him as both divine and human, and to conceive his humanity and divinity on a forceful and complex scale” (411).

Kṛṣṇa has many times told in the *Mahābhārata* that he is the cause of *pralaya* and *yugānta*. He justifies it in deed as well. He knows very well about Aśvatthāman’s plan of vengeance, but takes no action against his apocalyptic night slaughter. Instead of saving thousands of Pāṇḍava warriors, then asleep in their camp, from the wrath of Aśvatthāman, “Kṛṣṇa very conveniently leaves the camp on the eve of the slaughter, taking only his closest friends with him out of the camp” (Feller 282). The author, Vyāsa justifies Kṛṣṇa to be the cause of both *pralaya* and *yugānta* as the *Mahābhārata* war marks the end of *dvāparayuga* and the beginning of the *kali yuga*, and a *pralaya* takes place submerging Dvārakā under the sea a few days after the death of Kṛṣṇa at the hand of an ordinary hunter. The author, also known as Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, shares not only his name to the hero and the lord of the epic. “The two Kṛṣṇas” says ArtiDhand, “echo each other in a number of scenes, often reinforce and endorse each other, and seem to share many common purposes” (51).

Going through the *Mahābhārata* narratives, one frequently gets stuck at Emily T. Hudson’s dilemma whether Kṛṣṇa is good or evil, whether he is working for the benefit of human beings are working against them (242).

This ambiguity about Kṛṣṇa's morality is not unnatural. He is seen sometimes provoking the Pāṇḍavas for violation of war rules and *kṣatriya Dharma*, and sometimes cheating and intriguing. In other words, he is evidently involved in *adhārmic* (unrighteous) activities, though he insists on being an *avatār* of Viṣṇu, and says that he has descended on the earth in human form for establishing *dharma*. Nietzsche gives a theoretical solution to the Hudson's dilemma about Kṛṣṇa's morality with his philosophy of breeding a higher race of human beings who are ready to go beyond good and evil for the purpose of elevation of the self:

The noble type of man regards himself as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: 'What is injurious to me is injurious in itself'; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honor on things; he is a *creator of values*. He honors whatever he recognizes in himself: such morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would fain give and bestow: the nobleman also helps the unfortunate, but not – or scarcely – out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the super-abundance of power. (Beyond Good and Evil 666)

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* begins his journey with the life of an ordinary man, a mere spectator at Draupadi's *svayaṃvara*, but gradually he marches ahead towards the path of godhood with the exercise of super-abundance of power. His journey towards godhood comes to a completion due mainly to his approach to morality that the powerful soul, the higher and the nobler type, must always be able to go beyond the mass, and that going beyond the mass is possible only when one is able to go beyond good and evil.

REFERENCES

1. Bryant, Edwin F. "Kṛṣṇa in the Tenth Book of the BhāgavataPūrāṇa". *Kṛṣṇa: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Edwin F. Bryant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 111-136. Print.
2. Das, Gurcharan. *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012. Print.
3. Dhand, Arti. "The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahabharata: A Tale about Women, Smelly Ascetics, and God". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.1 (2004): 33-58. JSTOR. Web. 22 March 2014.
4. Dowd, Joseph. "Maximizing Dharma: Krishna's consequentialism in the Mahabharata". *Praxis* 3.1 (2011).33-50. Web. 14 June 2014.
5. Dowson, John. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and religion*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2007. Print.
6. Feller, Danielle. *The Sanskrit Epic's Representation of Vedic Myths*. Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass Publishers, 2003. Print.
7. Hildebeitel, Alf. *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata*. Ed. VishwaAdluri and JoydeepBagchee. Boston: Brill, 2011. Web. 18 Oct 2014.
8. Hudson, Emily T. "Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Poetics of suffering in the Mahābhārata". Diss. Emory University. 2006. Web. 12 October 2015.
9. Johnson, W. J. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*. 1st ed. London: oxford, 2010. Print.
10. Krishnananda, Swami. *The Spiritual Import of the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā*. The Divine Life Society, 2005. Web. 10 June 2013.

11. Lorenz, Ekkehard. "The Harivaṃśa: The Dynasty of Kṛṣṇa". *Kṛṣṇa: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Edwin F. Bryant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 95-109. Print.
12. Mahābhārata. 11th ed. 6 vols. Trans. Ramanarayanadatta Shastri Pandeya. Gorakhpura: Geeta press, 2058 B. S. Print.
13. Malinar, Angelika. "The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata TV serial: Domestic Drama and Dharmic Solutions". *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*. Eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Stietencron. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995. 442-467. Print.
14. Mehendale, M. A. "Interpolations in the Mahabharata". *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 8.1/2 (2001): 193-212. JSTOR. Web. 22 march 2014.
15. Minor, Robert N. "Kṛṣṇa in the BhagavadGītā". *Kṛṣṇa: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Edwin F. Bryant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 77-94. Print.
16. MullickBahadur, RaiPromathaNath. *The Mahabharata: as it was, is and ever shall be*. 1st ed. Allahbad: The Pioneer Press, 1934. Print.
17. Nietzsche, friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Ed. Tom Griffith. London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2008. Print.
18. Sonde, Nagesh D. *Krishna: A Study Based on Mahabharata*. 1st ed. Mumbai: Nagesh D. Sonde, 2008. Print.
19. Sukdaven, Maniraj. "An Investigation of the Notion of Avatāra in the Philosophical System of Shankara". Diss. University of the Free State. 2013. Web. 18 July 2014.
20. Thomas, Lynn. "The Identity of the Destroyer in the Mahābhārata". *Numen* 41.3 (1994): 255-272. JSTOR. Web. 22 March 2014.